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Corn crop off to fast start, say Ky. farmers

A good harvest could help offset rising costs

By **Bruce Schreiner**
Associated Press

In a dozen years of farming, Joe Nichols has never seen such a fast start for his corn crop in Western Kentucky.

He hopes that portends a bumper harvest on his 4,000 acres because he estimates that nearly one-third of yield potential stems from timely planting and early plant development.

"It's the quickest emergence that I've ever had on a corn crop," said Nichols. He farms in Trigg, Caldwell and Christian counties and was interviewed yesterday after walking a muddy field.

Nichols and other corn growers need to squeeze every possible bushel out of this year's harvest to offset soaring production costs: Fuel is up almost 45 percent and anhydrous ammonia nearly 25 percent from a year ago.

Growers in the state are wrapping up corn planting, with 85 percent complete as of Sunday.

That was ahead of last year's pace and the five-year average, said the Kentucky field office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Seventy percent of the crop had emerged, and 87 percent was rated good or excellent, the Monday report said. Kentucky farmers are expected to plant 1.07 million acres of corn, down 180,000 acres from a year ago.

Mike Ellis, who farms in Henry and Shelby counties, said his nitrogen-fertilizer costs have tripled in four years. He has no choice but to pay the price because "you don't get corn without nitrogen."

As a result, Ellis has cut corn production. He planted a little over 2,000 acres in corn this spring and will put out another 4,000 acres in soybeans. Usually, half his acreage is planted with corn.

Ellis said conditions have been ideal this spring for corn, unlike a year ago when late freezes forced him to replant about one-tenth of his acreage.

"We've started off with an excellent crop," he said. "We've been blessed."

With his corn in the fields, Ellis has moved headlong into soybean planting.

He expected to have 500 acres of beans planted by yesterday.

Statewide, 12 percent of soybean planting was complete as of Sunday, slightly behind last year and the

five-year average, the crop report said.

Soybean planting in Kentucky was pegged at 1.43 million acres, up 170,000 acres from last year, the reporting service said.

Nichols intends to plant about 3,400 acres of soybeans, including double-crop beans, once he harvests his wheat crop.

Ellis said corn prices are strong. Low soybean prices prompted Nichols make a last-minute production change, converting 1,000 acres into corn.

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